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Prevention of armed conflict

Letter dated 5 September 2013 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a copy of the summary report of the second Istanbul Conference on Mediation, entitled "Keys to Successful Mediation: Perspectives from Within", held in Istanbul, on 11 and 12 April 2013 (see annex).

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 33.

(*Signed*) Y. Halit **Çevik**
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 5 September 2013 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Summary report

Second Istanbul Conference on Mediation 11 and 12 April 2013, Istanbul

The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized the second Istanbul Conference on Mediation on 11 and 12 April 2013, the theme "Keys to Successful Mediation: Perspectives from Within". The conference was held under the auspices of H.E. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey.

The Istanbul Conferences on Mediation are designed to bring together international, governmental and civil society actors engaged in conflict prevention and mediation activities to discuss how to enhance interaction, understanding and cooperation among themselves with a view to increasing the effectiveness of the international community's mediation efforts. The Conference is gradually establishing itself as a traditional platform in the field of mediation and peaceful resolution of conflicts.

The first Istanbul Conference on Mediation, held on 24 and 25 February 2012, focused on the theoretical and conceptual aspects of mediation, including the role of the United Nations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and regional organizations and coordination and capacity-building problems. The first Conference was instrumental in analysing issues that were later addressed in the United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation, which is contained in the annex to the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution" (A/66/811). It also contributed to the objectives of the Mediation for Peace Initiative, which was launched in 2010 by Turkey and Finland and has become one of the main platforms for discussing and promoting mediation as an effective means for the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

In the light of the discussions at the first Conference, the second Istanbul Conference on Mediation focused on the practical lessons learned with regard to specific conflicts that have been prominent on the international agenda. The conference sought to examine issues in the field and practice of mediation by talking to practitioners from different sectors such as government, non-governmental and regional organizations, the United Nations and academia.

During the second Conference, five main panels were held on the themes "The Case of Afghanistan", "The Middle East Peace Process", "Conversation on Mediation: 'Ways to Success'", "The Case of Somalia" and "The Case of Syria". The sessions focused on the work of practitioners dealing directly with related issues in a wide array of geographical locations.

The Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Turkey and Finland, the President of the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly and the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process in the Philippines addressed the Conference at its high-level session.

Following is a summary of the discussions that took place at the Conference.

Summary of the panel discussions

During the sessions, the panellists shared their on-the-ground experiences in different mediation processes, making occasional cross-references to the United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation. In the debate, the importance of both internal and external support was raised as a factor contributing to a positive working environment for a mediation process. The fact that mediation usually takes place during transition makes it an inherently unstable and uncertain process. A mediator therefore needs the support of all relevant parties in order to ensure progress.

The importance of managing the mediation processes during inherently unstable transition periods was referred to by many discussants at the session on Afghanistan. While some participants pointed to the considerable uncertainties in the way leading to the post-2014 period, others mentioned the possibility of opportunities emerging to create a more inclusive and somewhat stable political system. Many participants underscored the importance of establishing a spirit of regional cooperation, such as the Heart of Asia Process, in order to lessen the current fragility of the transition period in Afghanistan.

The regional context was often mentioned as one of the most crucial determinants of the outcome of the mediation processes. During the debate on the Middle East peace process, the changing regional geopolitical landscape was singled out as a key variable to be considered, given the Arab transformations.

Another cross-cutting issue raised at the sessions was the need to foster the necessary internal factors in order to ensure the political willingness and commitment of the parties to the process. Spoilers should be accounted for and counteracted. External factors that affect the process are the attitudes of other interested parties, such as neighbouring countries or regional powers. Moreover, partners are needed at the international level, in the form of contact groups, regional or international organizations, and Member States with sufficient leverage, resources and expertise to accompany the mediation process.

In this regard, it was pointed out, for example, that the Mindanao peace process in the Philippines contained some useful lessons. First, in view of the decades-long history of the conflict, there have been breakaway groups that have undermined previous peace efforts. The challenge of breakaway groups is a reality that needs to be addressed, and thus the imperative of convergence is always present; it is important that the process be inclusive to be effective. The Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro provides a platform in which different constituencies work together to establish a new autonomous political entity with enhanced governance powers. Negotiation between the government and armed groups, third-party mediation from neighbouring Malaysia, and monitoring by local civil society groups and an international contact group were measures that enhanced and supported this process. In the case of the Philippines, clearly outlining the roles of everyone in the process beforehand, in order to monitor different expectations, was crucial to the process. The balancing of different interests both internally and regionally, and to achieve stability in the process, was a vital step.

Similarly, the unified position and concerted actions of the insider mediators and strong support coming from the regional actors and regional and international organizations were highlighted when efforts in assisting the Sudan and South Sudan

to achieve a durable peace were discussed. What ultimately led to a successful mediation process there was the unified, concerted position of the mediators and their continued support. A high-level African Union panel, which carried weight and capacity, had been introduced. The panel assured the two parties that there was complete confidence in the process and full support from the regional and the international communities. It was also noted that the process received the benefits of an insider impartial mediator.

When discussing the peace efforts in Somalia, it was stressed that the dialogue was essential in earning the trust of the warring clans. In this sense, it was mentioned that the reconciliation process should start at the grass-roots level. It was argued by many that the bottom-up approach adopted by the Government of Somalia to various sectors of the society to encourage them to be involved with the governmental processes was a step in the right direction. In the absence of alternative problem-solving norms, traditional mediation mechanisms provided a means of intervening between clans. Awareness had to be raised about the need to include women in these processes, as significant cultural barriers exist that challenge the ability of the Government to satisfy gender quotas.

The increasing prominence of the emerging countries as brokers of peace was also raised in the debate. The need for more formal cooperation mechanisms among emerging countries was underscored. The role that Turkey has started to play as a mediator, particularly in conflicts in its region, was also discussed. Some participants argued that there is a "Turkish model", which combines humanitarian and development aid with peaceful resolution of conflicts and mediation. Others argued that Turkey's capacity as an emerging country is important, and it should look into the options of optimizing its efforts through building capacity and in-house coordination, collaboration with other international actors and prioritization.

The participants also touched upon other dimensions of effective mediation, such as the strengths and the unity of the mediating team, and the issues of resources, preparedness and understanding the context. The role of luck and the chemistry between parties should not be underestimated in a mediation process. The ownership felt by the parties and the scope of inclusivity within the process, were also considered to be crucial for success. Without buy-in from the people, a successful agreement was not as likely. Lastly, the implementation stage of the mediated settlement could not be taken lightly by any of the parties involved.

The questions whether all conflicts could be the subject of mediation and what constitutes the right moment to initiate a mediation process were also discussed throughout the Conference in different sessions. On the panel about Syria, it was mentioned that in the current state of the conflict there is hardly room for mediation. The situation was growing increasingly complex and the death toll was rising daily. That said, mediation could still facilitate clarification of the issues and the opening up of certain points for discussion, such as humanitarian access to the country. All participants emphasized that in the long term, the Syrian people's right to collectively determine their political future must be central to the mediation process. The participation of women at all levels of the mediation process was also essential.

Discussants often referred to the root causes of the failures in various mediation attempts. Competition between initiatives and mediators was often cited as a main reason for lack of success. A lack of coordination between efforts for a mediated settlement could cause great damage. This aspect also applied directly to

the role of the Security Council; its unity is also crucial to peace and security in the world. Although the Charter of the United Nations states that resolving conflict is first and foremost the responsibility of the Member States, the United Nations has tried to help build State capacity to deal with these issues. There was clearly a need for the professionalization of the field of mediation. A carefully designed process implemented with due consideration would more likely result in success.

High-level session

Teresita Quintos Deles, Secretary, Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process in the Philippines, commended the Conference for providing a forum for mediators from all over the world to gather to discuss concepts and contested ideas away from the pressures of their work. She also expressed gratitude to the Government of Turkey for its support for the efforts of the Government of the Philippines regarding the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and for supporting mediation and reconciliation efforts globally. She stressed the importance of acknowledging the will of the parties and communities to the conflict during the mediation process, and the need to resist any policies of the international community that undermine local processes. She also highlighted the deficit of women participants in track-I diplomacy and at the mediation table. Ms. Deles suggested that it was time to confront the reasons and conditions for the lack of women in the area of mediation, given that they account for half the population in all conflict-riddled areas. Finally, she stated the need to reach out to the younger generation through new technological means in order to ensure the sustainability of peace processes, as they are now the growing majority in many countries.

The President of the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly praised Mr. Davutoğlu as an exceptional mediator. He commended the Istanbul Conference for helping to increase discussions on mediation and other forms of peaceful settlement. He stated that mediation, by its nature, is a process that looks to the future, to empower citizens while seeking to reconcile and restore trust between parties. The President of the General Assembly stressed the importance of mediation as a dynamic and peaceful process that is especially relevant to resolving current conflicts in the Great Lakes and Sahel regions of Africa and the security transition in Afghanistan. He acknowledged that there have been positive developments regarding the promotion of Palestine to the status of observer State in the General Assembly, but emphasized that mediation would play a crucial role in the settlement of the conflict with Israel. He condemned the abuse of human rights in Syria and called for an immediate cessation of hostilities, labelling the violence there the most horrific bloodbath of our time. The President warned also that allowing the violence to run its course would be devastating for both civilians and the society. He stated that a free and pluralistic Syrian society is the solution to the conflict and that the international community must rally around those who can influence an end to the fighting. Quoting the references in the Holy Quran and the Holy Bible to the virtues of a mediator, he emphasized that a true mediator is an equal friend to each party, acting impartially in seeking a just result, irrespective of preferences or interests.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Erkki Tuomioja, expressed his satisfaction at Finland's productive partnership with Turkey in strengthening mediation norms and putting it high on the United Nations agenda. He stated that the mediation process needed more coherence and support from the international community to be successful, especially in relation to Syria. He cautioned that an

increasing arms transfer to the rebels would not lead to a solution. This could only be achieved through mediation. Mr. Tuomioja called the situation in Syria a humanitarian catastrophe, and argued that the international community must support the neighbouring countries of Syria to prevent a spillover of the conflict. He reiterated Ms. Deles's call for the increased participation of women in the mediation and post-conflict settlement processes. He warned that there is no development if women lack equal rights, and argued that women must be encouraged to raise their voices. He also highlighted the importance of the participation of women in Afghanistan as key to the settlement of the peace process and the country's future, and thanked Turkey for its leadership role. He expressed his support for Somali reconciliation and the need for good governance practices. He suggested that when governments are weak, traditional mediation structures should be explored, but women having a role must also be ensured. He ended by arguing that the international community must find the will to try to resolve the most persistent conflicts, because all conflicts can be settled.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey stated that there is a moral duty to help end conflicts in the world, and to secure a future for generations by protecting the environment from nuclear and chemical weapons. He reaffirmed Turkey's continued support to its brothers in Afghanistan, Syria and Somalia. Mr. Davutoğlu agreed that the only solution to the Syrian crisis is one that offers the Syrian people the opportunity to decide their future. He highlighted the demand for mediated settlements of conflicts and reiterated Turkey's interests in mediating such matters, given its geographical position at the centre of Afro-Eurasia. The minister argued that a new approach to mediation is needed and must occur on three levels. Regarding the national level, he discussed the restructuring of traditional political notions of the State with the emergence and broad application of new technology and communication. He argued that old forms of political legitimacy based on ideology are failing, and, instead, people are insisting on security and human dignity. He emphasized the need to address regional issues as well, in order to resolve protracted conflicts, with regional actors as integral to the process. On the question of Palestine, he called for support for a two-State solution and the recognition of the 1967 borders. He said that the key issues of Palestinian refugees and Jerusalem need to be addressed with a new approach. He stated the need for visionary justice and order at the global level and pointed to the imbalance between the United Nations Security Council and the General Assembly. Lastly, he condemned the immobility of the international community in preventing the escalation of violent conflict.

Second Istanbul Conference on Mediation

Keys to Successful Mediation: Perspectives from Within

Istanbul, 11 and 12 April 2013

11 April

09.30-09.45	Registration
09.45-10.00	Welcome address by Ambassador Şafak Göktürk, Director-General for Policy Planning, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
10.00-11.30	**First session: The Case of Afghanistan**

Moderator: Francesc Vendrell, former Special Representative of the European Union and the United Nations for Afghanistan

What are the main challenges facing Afghanistan in the next two years that will be decisive in the establishment of lasting peace and stability in the country after 2014? What are the Afghan High Peace Council's priorities and expectations from the reconciliation process? What are the issues hindering the progress of the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan? How can these be overcome? How can the armed opposition groups be engaged on a political platform? How should the international community assist the Afghan Government in its efforts? What is the role of the immediate and regional neighbours? How are the current processes contributing to mediation efforts?

- Jan Kubis, Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Afghanistan
- Aziz Ahmed Khan, Consultant, National Defense University, Islamabad, Pakistan
- Masoom Stanekzai, Head of the Afghan High Peace Council Secretariat, Afghanistan
- Basat Öztürk, Ambassador of Turkey to Afghanistan

11.30-12.00	Coffee break
12.00-13.30	**Second session: The Middle East Peace Process**

Moderator: Mouin Rabbani, Crisis Management Initiative, Palestine Director

How much does the Israeli-Palestinian issue still matter in its own right and strategically, given the Arab Spring and other developments in the region? What are the current realities of the political and economic environment for progress towards Israeli-Palestinian peace? Is a two-State solution still viable? How could it be re-launched? What is the legacy of the Oslo model and its incremental approach? How can momentum be built for a two-State solution? What are the major impediments? Are there incentives that could lead to a change of course by both parties? How can peace constituencies be reinforced? If a two-State solution is no longer viable or is not achieved, are there alternatives? Are alternatives to the two-State solution practical?

- Samih al-Abed, former Minister, Member of the Palestinian Negotiation Team
- Yossi Beilin, former Minister, Israeli politician
- Taha Özhan, President of the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research
- Professor Paolo Cotta-Ramusino, Secretary General of Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs

13.45-15.00 Lunch break

15.30-17.30 **Third session: Conversation on Mediation — "Ways to Success"**

Moderator: Professor Bülent Aras, Chairman of the Center for Strategic Research, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkey

- Teresita Quintos Deles, Secretary, Office of the President for the Peace Process, Philippines
- Haile Menkerios, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Sudan and South Sudan
- Levent Bilman, Director, Policy and Mediation Division, Department of Political Affairs, United Nations Secretariat
- Professor Fuat Keyman, Director, Istanbul Policy Center, Sabancı University

20.00-22.00 Welcome dinner

12 April, Friday

10.00-11.30 **Fourth session: The Case of Somalia**

Moderator: Mahamat Saleh Annadif, African Union Special Representative for Somalia and Head of the African Union Mission in Somalia

What are the root causes of the 20-year-long Somali conflict? What are the lessons learned from the previous mediation efforts in Somalia? How can the international community assist the Federal Government to develop its capacity and resources in the State-building and peacebuilding processes in a coordinated and harmonized manner? Is it more appropriate to follow a bottom-up approach in rebuilding the State institutions and functions? What are the challenges in the security and justice sector reform effort? What are the real issues before the attainment of national reconciliation? What are the Federal Government's priorities and expectations in the reconciliation area? Does the Federal Government have the necessary capabilities and tools in this area? How can we increase our understanding and knowledge about the stakeholders who are the influential local leaders in the Somali society as well as about the local conditions?

- Jamal Mohamed Barrow, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Somalia

- Kani Torun, Ambassador of Turkey to Somalia
- Alexander Rondos, European Union Special Representative for the Horn of Africa
- Afyare Abdi Elmi, author and Assistant Professor at Qatar University

11.30-12.00 Coffee break

12.00-13.30 **Fifth session: The Case of Syria**

Moderator: Peter Harling, Project Director, Middle East Program, International Crisis Group

What role, if there is any exists in Syria for mediation at the current stage of the conflict? In the course of the evolution of the conflict, has there been any particular moment where mediation could have produced significant change? What is the best way of having the Syrians in the driver seat for a peaceful and lasting solution? How and to which extent can the international community contribute to such an effort? Should international community commit itself in advance to safeguard the full implementation of any possible outcome reached in dialogue efforts? Would it be helpful to bring together the eminent persons across the region representing different religions, sects and ethnic groups under the umbrella of a regional platform with a view to supporting the efforts towards lasting stability in Syria? What are the main prerequisites for a successful transition in Syria? Is a transition with some elements of the Assad regime retaining some form of power a viable option?

- Mustafa Sabbagh, Secretary General of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces
- Ömer Önhon, Deputy Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey/former Ambassador to Syria
- Jon Wilks, United Kingdom Representative to the Syrian Opposition

14.00-15.30 Lunch hosted by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey

15.15-17.00 **Concluding (high-level) session**

Presenter: Ambassador Şafak Göktürk, Director-General for Policy Planning, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

- H.E. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Turkey
- H.E. Erkki Tuomioja, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Finland
- H.E. Vuk Jeremic, President of the sixty-seventh session of the United Nations General Assembly
- H.E. Teresita Quintos Deles, Secretary, Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process in the Philippines